

VZCZCXRO2044
OO RUEHAG RUEHROV
DE RUEHMO #2035 3001045
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 271045Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4591
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0140
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 2160

S E C R E T MOSCOW 012035

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IS](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: OLMERT VISIT: AUSPICIOUS START

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: 1.4(B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Israeli PM Ehud Olmert's first working visit to Moscow as prime minister coincided with the 15th anniversary of Israel-Russia renewed diplomatic ties. The issues discussed in Olmert's three meetings--with President Putin, FM Lavrov and Defense Minister Ivanov--included the Middle East, Palestine, Iran, and Lebanon. The October 18 meeting with Putin lasted over four hours and suggested that the warm relationship that existed between Putin and Sharon will continue with Olmert. Olmert is well known here, as he sat on the intergovernmental commission before becoming Prime Minister. Next on the bilateral agenda: the annual intergovernmental commission, which convenes in Israel in November. End summary.

Key Question: Situation in the Middle East

¶2. (C) According to MFA Middle East Desk Director Vladimir Baibakov, Olmert told the Russians that Israel adheres to the "Roadmap" but was open to other suggestions for reviving the peace process. He criticized GOR engagement with Hamas, which Olmert's GOR interlocutors spun as Putin's effort to ensure that all possible avenues to a peace process were thoroughly explored. Olmert described his failed initial efforts to engage with Hamas, and his reluctant conclusion that Abbas is the only possible partner in Palestine. According to Baibakov, Olmert, for the first time, mentioned possible financial aid and assistance to Abbas's security forces. The GOR welcomed Olmert's unconditional readiness to meet Abbas.

¶3. (S) Presidential Administration foreign policy advisor Sergey Prikhodko told the Ambassador that Olmert was noncommittal on the GOR's renewed push to transfer 50 armored transport vehicles to Palestinian security forces loyal to President Abbas, with the Prime Minister "taking it under consideration."

Lebanon: UNSCR 1701 a Good Basis

¶4. (C) Olmert told the Russians that he is ready to meet with Lebanese PM Siniora. Olmert did not conceal his concern about the border with Syria. Baibakov said the subject of Russian weapons found in Hezbollah's possession was also discussed. Baibakov thought that the source of the weapons--he noted that Hezbollah is well armed with American, Russian, French and even Israeli materiel--is less important than the measures necessary to curb the flow of weapons. The GOR continues to believe that only a comprehensive peace process involving all parties, including Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Israel, can be successful.

¶5. (C) According to Prikhodko, Putin raised the GOR's bilateral contribution of an engineering battalion, with the

President expressing skepticism over the viability of the UN peacekeeping operation. Putin noted his preference for the pragmatic objective of rebuilding bridges.

Iran: Let there be no Mistake

16. (C) Olmert devoted most of his time in Moscow to Iran, where he disagreed with the GOR's "more flexible" position. According to Baibakov, the GOR continues to believe that ending negotiations with Iran complicates the international community's efforts to track events there, and to find useful pressure points. Olmert, according to Prikhodko, pushed back strongly against the Russian assessment that Iran is 6-8 years away from being a nuclear power, arguing that the Iranian regime could develop a nuclear weapon within 1-2 years.

Good Rapport

17. (C) Olmert is well-known here from his previous service on the GOR-GOI intergovernmental commission, and is a well-liked, native of Odessa. Prikhodko confirmed the good rapport between the leaders, with Putin personally impressed by his interlocutor, whom he thought was a strong leader as a result of his initiation by fire in the Lebanon conflict. The visit was marred by Putin's off-color remarks on the sex scandal involving President Katsav, which was captured by journalists. The next high-level GOR-GOI engagement will be in the November session of the intergovernmental commission in Israel.
BURNS